

9-1995

sepA1995

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## MEASURES

*A life is only to give.  
Thinking is clearly something else.  
A thought is tantamount.  
To leaving.*

0.  
What could they be  
that are so delicate,  
pleasures? Measures.

1.  
A swan's head lifted from the turmoil of riding  
waves, the secret paddling  
by which they move. They thrive.

Asleep in a canoe,  
artificer! Have I found you again  
by the railroad trestle

over the doomed lagoon  
water caltrops muskrat lodge  
the skeet shooters of October with live targets.

And the woman asleep in the canoe turns,  
rolls over on her right side. The canoe  
sloshes a little in the shallows but is dry inside.

Although the breeze is cool  
it seems to be coming straight out of the sun.  
We live by horizons.

2.  
Are you sleeping when I need you?  
On her right side she dreams of new weather:  
a snow squall out of the sun that engulfs her

she wakes in warm golden flakes  
that mass around her, bell song in the air,  
she sneezes with pleasure.

A green wind  
suddenly drives out the snow  
that drifts soft sifting from her face like cornmeal,

with fine cornmeal in her sleep she writes  
words on the proud embankments of famous rivers,  
foreign rivers. The canoe beneath her heaves

guilty, lifted by dwindling ripples  
of a boat's wake, a boat from now  
that's already far, its engine

out of earshot. An earshot is precisely eight  
thousand times the distance from the knob of her elbow  
to the tip of her middle finger.

3.

Her middle finger, coated with cornmeal,  
she lifts to her lips and licks, almost waking.  
The taste for danger.

The danger moments in a creature's life  
are those when things make their passage through  
the barrier of self or skin.

Eating, drinking, excreting,  
belching, sneezing, breaking wind, being plumbed  
by love's searching chreodes, even breathing

if you don't breathe right.  
She breathes gently on the floor of the canoe,  
her breath blows away the dream weather,

a boat passes, she tosses  
over onto her left side  
not even pausing to lie flat on her back

so the hidden daytime stars can see her.  
On her left side she lies, her closed eyes  
stare into a library somewhere,

the shelves are always receding,  
she is reading a book in their shadows,  
she is wondering about a word.

4.

Is torpedo from the same root as torpor,  
named for a fish that makes flesh numb?  
A cruel bomb beneath calm water moving.

Is war a kind of angry torpor?  
She is in the boat and she is frightened.  
Not far from her a swan alone is passing

though usually you see them two by two.

1 September 1995  
[revised 9 II 96]

## MARSYAS

What had been me,  
if it had gone forward  
into the vacancy  
would have found  
a fortress lit  
entirely by blue light. Skaters  
silently zipped around it  
on acres of ice. It would  
have heard only its own,  
circulation of the periphery,  
a cool responsibility.  
It would have called itself Nature  
and everything else The Human.  
That's how the words  
always sounded  
if there was air.  
Language happens only to air.  
Inside the castle  
defenders were busy in the archives  
trying to build a functional calendar.  
Peaches and cream. Titian's  
self-portrait held in Apollo's  
—maybe a little repentant?  
rueful? Hands. I keep thinking  
of the same things,  
that's what makes it me,  
this sequence of images reminded  
—vaguely, tenderly, uneasily—  
of each other, out loud, very,  
and to you, calling like a big  
peacock in a small enclosure  
I heard years ago in a small  
town park in winter.

If it had kept going

it would have encountered  
a chiasmus in the path  
(left, right, past, future)  
and probably would have  
camped there for the night  
in its huge silken tent  
translucent in so many colors  
that when the Coleman lamps  
lit up inside, the pavilion  
looks like a bead of Venice glass  
half-buried in night loam.  
It would have been pleased  
to look that way  
but it was sleeping.

There was not enough air  
to speak or feel, plenty to breathe  
though. Even a kind of wind  
that alarmed the smaller branches  
of the evergreens — you name them —  
while hardly moving the trunks.  
Still, there were voices aplenty  
in the woods, where sailors  
from the *Dido* were searching  
by torchlight for one big pine  
to lop for their new mainmast—  
the old one shivered after  
that storm it never even knew it had.  
If you look long enough at anything  
you see your own face looking back at you.

2 September 1995  
[revised 9 II 96]

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When fruit is given who is giving?  
The ambiguity of the passive

(or reflexive — Saint-Saens, did we  
overlap on this planetary cycle?)

confuses just our reflexive us.  
Just us. The pear tree

knows what to do  
if you call it doing.

And it doesn't,  
it just does.

3 September 1995

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Crows investigate the huge basilica of thinking.  
They are not distinguishable from everything  
else except by name. They keep crying out their name.

3 September 1995



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Transported, how the capacity  
inheres in the instrument.

Pens write me. Touches  
you with a remarkable  
fluent skin, the language

goes so far. Language is skin.  
There is a dark  
republic it covers but it does not say.

4 September 1995

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Caught in the map  
the traveler  
sullenly understands.

His feet  
are nowhere.

Crows are lecturing  
in empty meadows.

Here we are again, he  
isn't even thirsty.

5 September 1995

## MURANO

Hurrying there from a scripture of the 'Leaf' class  
into the glass workshop of the Armenian immigrants  
where light is taught to make a tinkling noise.  
But in the back room, surrounded by tea cups and flies,  
the blind patriarch measures the whole weight of light.

5 September 1995

## FRAGRANCES OF WHEAT

The heat of yesterday still ringing in my ears  
I found myself worrying about the cactuses,  
pelargoniums, aloes, where  
will I put them inside  
to be safe from winter? And the broad  
uplift of the clivia, that viscountess  
among amaryllises? Suddenly I know  
it's cool. At my feet  
a furry-bear caterpillar  
prophesies early winter.  
*Soon winter, long winter* is what I hear—  
and then I realize that my body has been listening.

6 September 1995

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Counterpoise — the star  
balanced on the morning

brings you greeting  
from the ones

who were before.  
And they were ones,

only ones and never more  
and soon forever,

never two or more  
however many

ones of  
them there are,

were, sing. All  
sound is song.

6 September 1995  
KTC

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Getting organized is part of it  
but which part? The alligator  
in the subway, the bizarre  
remembrances of passion  
that suddenly like sodium  
vapor lamps on Eighth Avenue  
light up in memory, the limbs  
of all their bodies, endless  
waits impaneled by anxiety,  
eternal cafes, breathless rivers.  
I see her walking in a city air  
not forgotten but all my need  
forgotten, beyond connection,  
echo of a snapshot of a wish  
I saw one day in sunlight, Sunday,  
ever after. And now no one  
knows who any body is.

6 September 1995

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Caught up with the sky  
a blessed haze

to dim the clamor of the day  
so hard the light has been

Ask a woman about a diamond  
a priest about a shadow  
everything answers

“relief  
is in the air”

though summer still besets us, you can feel  
every pronoun in the world  
softly changing in the night

I wake up you  
you wake up everyone

and who are they?  
They are changed now into prowless boats  
adrift on a kind dark sea.

7 September 1995

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*for Charlotte*

Almost midnight and  
I must have had something to say,

it was a day,  
I walked around

like trying to find an uncrowded bank in Thonon  
on market day

the lake stretching, gleaming dark as asphalt,  
far into the Swiss sunlight over there,

nothing difficult, nothing international, nothing  
with coffee and biscuits and hawthorn

just with my life I mean my wife up there  
among the cool alleys of spicebush and maybe  
some deer browsing not far from the river

but not very near it either.

8 September 1995



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Caught by augury  
mere augury — a squirrel  
drees its astrology,  
little nut in little paws

feverishly seeking  
on our lawn, meek  
feed-me of lower earth,  
meek anxious grey I-love-you,

we are abandoned to our needs.  
Soon an iridescent grackle  
nabs some duck food,  
the things we have to swallow

to be beautiful! Church  
steeple at Combray,  
one more sign in one more sky.

9 September 1995

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If we are feeding, let it be everyone.  
If we are waiting, let it be for light.  
If we are sleeping, let all pain sleep with us.  
If we wake, let everyone be up before us.

9 September 1995

## THE INTERDICTION

Her eyes so black he remembered them blue —  
and so we give color to the opaque identities  
who center around us all day long

silent as dreams, and all we understand  
— if that — is their names. And their names  
— as every child learns at last with such grief —  
have nothing to tell us.

9 September 1995

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What is waiting  
to tell.  
A color  
in a bird's wing

you said said  
your name?  
The skin  
is in love

and with everyone,  
by such strange  
signs as touch  
it would be known—

say nothing  
and feel everything,  
that is everybody  
else's name, not yours.

You are the one  
who has to tell,  
a strange bird,  
a peaceful wing.

9 September 1995

# OISEAUX

*for Colette*

As if they were also waiting.  
Stand after repose.  
They make us so happy  
to look at them,

birds. Waiting  
in the sky for a tree,  
in a tree for seed, on earth  
for heaven. The neat

array of feathers, the sudden  
hugeness of white wings  
open. The flurry of them  
suddenly calm.

9 September 1995

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Heart-shaped leaves on the ground  
pale but not yellow,  
do linden do  
that fading or that color,

the pinwheel rattles in the west wind,  
blue autumn towards us  
leaning, a sky  
scarred, perfected

after all we have seen through.

10 September 1995

## THE IMAGE

It all might be waiting,  
or salt tear slipped between  
impastoed lashes

one waits  
agreeably  
for one's fate

pinned  
to the circumstance  
the velvet cords

analyze consent.  
In the darkened room  
no one is coming.

10 September 1995

## EXORDIUMS TO EXAGGERATE

just to get through  
the door. I am so big  
the air touches me  
on every pore, so small  
I can walk sideways  
through the light  
and you will not see me,

now, even now,  
if you look up.

11 September 1995



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Is it thinking?  
Or am I raining?

12 September 1995